

# North Pembrokeshire Transport Forum Fforwm Trafnidiaeth Gogledd Penfro

[National Assembly for Wales](#)

[Enterprise and Business Committee](#)

[Inquiry into the future of the Wales and Borders Rail](#)

Evidence from North Pembrokeshire Transport Forum – WBF 51

## National Assembly Enterprise & Business Committee Inquiry into the Future of the Wales & Borders Rail Franchise

### 1. Introduction

1.1. The North Pembrokeshire Transport Forum (NPTF), an independent voluntary group, was set up in 2000. Its key aims and objectives are: to work for the provision of effective, integrated transport services to, from and within North Pembrokeshire; to promote the benefits of public transport; and to provide an advice and assistance service to the travelling public.

1.2. The Forum began work at a time of 'great change for the better' with regard to transport in Wales. It rapidly became clear that the transport policies of the new National Assembly for Wales were progressive in the best sense of the word and that these policies were broadly in line with the Forum's aims and objectives.

1.3. Since 2000 there has been a remarkable development in the quality and range of bus and community transport services in North Pembrokeshire, as well as an impressive increase in the number of cycling and walking paths.

1.4. On the other hand, until the trial provision of additional services to Fishguard in 2011, rail services were woefully inadequate, the only provision being the mid-day and mid-night boat train services. Because of this limited frequency and the times that the services operated, rail services did not meet the needs of local residents or visitors to North Pembrokeshire. Bearing this in mind, the Forum strenuously backed calls for additional train services to Fishguard and re-opening Fishguard and Goodwick station.

### 2. The 2003 Wales & Borders Franchise

2.1. The Franchise Replacement Process. The Strategic Rail Authority (SRA) Wales and Borders Franchise replacement process commenced in August 2000, and the short list of bidders was announced on 15<sup>th</sup> February 2001. The franchise process then came to a halt, and a succeeding replacement process commenced in December. On 7<sup>th</sup> April 2003 new short listed bidders submitted their 'Best and Final Offers', and Arriva Trains was declared the preferred bidder on 1<sup>st</sup> August. The 15-year franchise agreement with the SRA was signed on 20<sup>th</sup> October 2003, and on 7<sup>th</sup> December 2003, Arriva Trains Cymru-Wales took over operation of the Wales and Borders Franchise.

#### 2.2. Concerns about the Franchise.

2.2.1 *The House of Commons Welsh Affairs Committee* (WAC) report *The Provision of Rail Services in Wales* (17<sup>th</sup> March 2004) raised a number of concerns about the franchise. From the NPTF's perspective the following were of particular concern:

- The requirement for the franchise to comply with existing passenger service levels.
- The limited franchise subsidy levels.
- The exclusion of new stations or station improvements in the fixed annual payments.
- The fact that funding for the franchise excluded the acquisition of new rolling stock.

2.2.2. *Rail Passengers Committee Cymru Wales* (RPCW). In evidence to the WAC on 17<sup>th</sup> November 2003, RPCW representatives expressed similar concerns and added that, although RPCW had been extremely proactive in gathering information about what passengers wanted, it had had no input into the franchise replacement process.

### **3. Services to Fishguard**

#### **3.1. Evidence of Dissatisfaction with Fishguard Services.**

- Fishguard, Goodwick and Pencaer Community Appraisal (1999). 55.1% not satisfied with Fishguard train services.
- NPTF survey (2000). 55% of comments about train services negative. Frequency of service received the greatest number of negative comments.
- NPTF survey (2002). 88% of comments about frequency were negative. No positive comments made about frequency.
- NPTF Survey (2004). 80% 'very poor' + 'poor' service rating. All but four of the 245 respondents provided examples of enhancements that would attract them onto the train or cause them to travel by train more often, particularly 'more regular, convenient services during the day'.

#### **3.2. Calls for Increased Service Frequency.**

- NPTF Aspirations for Rail Services to Fishguard and North Pembrokeshire (September 2001). Increase in the number of trains per day based on National Assembly for Wales suggested standards for rural routes. Re-open Fishguard and Goodwick rail station.
- RPCW 12 Point Plan to Improve Rail Services in Wales (November 2001). An early morning and late afternoon service providing year round daily journey to work opportunities to Carmarthen and fast (catamaran) ferry connections.
- NPTF Aspirations for Improved Rail Services to Fishguard (November 2002). Passengers to reach Carmarthen by 9am and return from Carmarthen at the end of the day without a change of train. Additional daytime services to be evenly spaced and provide reasonable ferry connections. (The 2 hourly service aspiration of the National Assembly for Wales for rural routes was noted).
- The Jacobs Rail Study (July 2007). Preferred option of shuttle services between Fishguard and Carmarthen, to connect with existing main line services. Timetable designed to meet the needs of local residents, visitors to the area. Support for the proposal to re-open Goodwick Station.
- South West Wales Integrated Transport Consortium (SWWITCH) Management Group (July 2007). Following Management Group approval, Jacobs study findings were referred to the WAG Rail Unit.
- Fishguard Trains Petition (September-November 2009). The petition, calling for more trains to Fishguard, was organised by Moylegrove (North Pembrokeshire) 15-year olds Sam Faulkner and Joanne Griffiths. In November, the petition (with over 1,300 signatures), now calling for the WAG to provide funding for 5 additional trains per day to Fishguard, was submitted to the National Assembly Petitions Committee.
- National Assembly Enterprise and Learning Committee. Future Railway Infrastructure in Wales (January 2010). Recommendation that the Welsh Government (WG) should agree to fund the proposal for providing additional trains to Fishguard. (SWWITCH informed the Committee that 'the business case for the additional services was "robust" because they would increase commuting and the wider use of rail, as well as benefiting connectivity across the network').
- SWWITCH Regional Transport Plan, 2010-2015. Preserve and enhance the Fishguard rail service among RTP Short Term Priorities.

### **4. Trial Increase in Rail Services to Fishguard**

4.1. The Railways Act 2005. The Act abolished the Strategic Rail Authority and transferred a number of its powers to the Welsh Government. Notably, the Act allows the Welsh Government to designate new passenger services as experimental for a trial period of up to five years where the majority of funding is provided by the Welsh Government.

4.2. Funding for Trial Increase in Fishguard Rail Services. On 29<sup>th</sup> March 2011 Deputy First Minister Ieuan Wyn Jones AM announced up to £1.4m funding annually to provide extra train services to Fishguard: five additional trains to run between Fishguard and Carmarthen, commencing in September 2011. A review of the extra services would be carried out after the third year of the scheme to identify demand and passenger numbers, the nature of trips taken, and would at that time seek further community and user views.

4.3. Significant Increase in Passenger Numbers. On 9<sup>th</sup> November 2012 Carl Sargeant AM, Minister with Responsibility for Transport, announced that the extra services had already resulted in a 48% increase; passenger journeys in the last year had totalled 45,334 compared to the previous year's figure of 30,682. A more detailed appraisal would be undertaken in the coming year to assist in the consideration for future services beyond the initial pilot period.

### **5. Inquiry into the Future of the Wales and Borders Rail Franchise**

5.1. Contribution from the North Pembrokeshire Transport Forum (NPTF). NPTF welcomes the opportunity to contribute to this inquiry. Our response will reflect the views and experiences of

passengers using train services to/from Fishguard between 2000 and 2012, concentrating on the main issues of concern referred to in Section 2. The 2003 Wales and Borders Franchise. Section 2.2.1, namely:

1. The requirement for the franchise to comply with existing passenger service levels.
2. The limited franchise subsidy levels.
3. The exclusion of new stations or station improvements in the fixed annual payments.
4. The fact that funding for the franchise excluded the acquisition of new rolling stock.

## 6. Terms of Reference

### 6.1. What lessons can be learnt from the current franchise?

6.1.1. Due to the requirement to comply with existing passenger service levels, it was only possible to provide additional rail services to Fishguard (**as a trial**) after the 2005 Railways Act came into force.

6.1.2. Without funding from the WG (**not** from limited subsidy funding) the additional rail services to Fishguard could not have been provided.

6.1.3. Without funding provided **outside** of the current franchise settlement, Fishguard and Goodwick station would not have been re-opened.

6.1.4. Acquisition of improved rolling stock, suitable for long distance services to/from Fishguard, is **ruled out** in the current franchise agreement. There has been minimal rolling stock improvement in 2011: the 2 early morning 175 trains serving Fishguard.

6.1.5. NPTF endorses the SWWITCH comments about the added benefits that would accrue from the provision of greater frequency of services and improved quality of rolling stock. The Forum also agrees with the SWWITCH remarks regarding longer as opposed to shorter franchise lengths, and believes that it is essential that the terms of the next franchise set targets for improvement and encourage innovation to meet growth and changing needs.

### 6.2. What priorities can be identified to ensure that rail passenger services in Wales and the borders provide the best possible service for passengers from 2018?

6.2.1. Fishguard Rolling Stock. While rolling stock improvements have been made since the introduction of the additional Fishguard trains (see section 6.1.4), the rolling stock on the remaining services has ranged from inadequate (150s) to adequately refurbished (158s). Lack of sufficient capacity on 150s and 158s can be a serious issue; and facilities suited to long distance travel (in particular, plenty of luggage space and clean, well functioning toilets) are of critical importance. As NPTF surveys and other means of communication consistently reveal a striking number of passengers (retired and in employment) who want or need to work on the train, we support the provision of Wi-Fi on rolling stock.

6.2.2. Carriage of bicycles on rolling stock. Although the new train services provide tourists with much better access to Fishguard, NPTF supports the call by SWWITCH for improved rolling stock to allow carriage of greater numbers of bicycles, in order to attract even greater numbers of cyclists onto the train. NPTF also endorses the National Assembly Enterprise and Business Committee's recommendation of the that the Welsh Government should take steps to enhance provision for bikes on buses and trains. (Integrated Public Transport in Wales. Recommendation 7. May 2013).

6.2.3. Tourism. The new Swansea Bay City Region (encompassing Pembrokeshire, Carmarthenshire, City and County of Swansea and Neath Port Talbot) will be developing strategies for economic regeneration, with Pembrokeshire County Council leading on Tourism.

6.2.4. Pembrokeshire already provides well developed sustainable transport by bus, cycling and walking, that enables tourists to get around the County without a car. The current franchise passenger service requirement for Fishguard Harbour can do little to facilitate access to Fishguard and North Pembrokeshire by tourists (including cyclists and walkers). The additional trial services to Fishguard have at least provided significantly improved access to tourists travelling on foot.

### 6.3. How can service delivery after 2018 deliver connectivity and value for money for passengers while reducing the burden on the tax payer?

3.1. NPTF finds it difficult to respond to this question, in view of the fact that there is no guarantee that funding for the additional Fishguard services will continue after the end of the trial period, four years before the launch of the 2018 franchise. If these services cease, the Forum and North Pembrokeshire rail passengers will be forced to begin work making the case for including improved rail services to Fishguard in the new franchise.

## 7. NPTF Responses to Selected Key Issues

### 7.1. Whether the current franchise meets passenger needs and what lessons should be learnt from it.

7.1.1. As noted above (*in* sections 6.1.1-6.1.4) the current passenger franchise did not meet the needs of Fishguard and North Pembrokeshire passengers. The 48% increase in passenger numbers in the first

year after the additional services to Fishguard were introduced were a direct result of improvements that were made **outside** of the franchise agreement.

7.1.2. The lesson to be learnt is surely that a franchise needs to be one that meets passenger needs and that promotes growth while being flexible enough to react to changes in demand.

#### 7.2. How passengers should be involved in the franchise development and delivery.

7.2.1. NPTF developed detailed aspirations for improved services to Fishguard and invited short listed bidders in both of the franchise replacement exercises to discuss them at meetings in Fishguard.

7.2.2. Although not an example of involvement in the development and delivery of the current franchise, the example of how passenger groups helped in the development and delivery of the additional Fishguard rail services provides a good illustration of passenger/local involvement in the development and delivery process.

7.2.3. Representing passengers' interests, NPTF and All Points West (the South West Wales Community Rail Partnership) worked closely in Fishguard/Goodwick with representatives from the WG Rail Unit, SWWITCH, Pembrokeshire County Council (PCC) and Arriva Trains Wales (ATW) to develop and put out to community consultation a timetable designed to meet passenger needs. Following a favourable response, the group continued to work together on arrangements for the Ministerial launch of the new services in September 2011. This local involvement continued following the subsequent decision to re-open Fishguard and Goodwick Station. For the first six months of the operation of the new services, NPTF carried out a service evaluation survey, scanning and forwarding passenger responses to the Rail Unit, SWWITCH, ATW, PCC and others with an interest in these rail services. An analysis of the comments was provided at the end of the survey period.

#### 7.3. How the franchise specification should improve the passenger experience, including issues such as franchise length, targets / incentives and the core service standards which should be included.

7.3.1. As our primary focus is on how the franchise should improve the passenger experiences of North Pembrokeshire rail passengers, NPTF's comments will be based on the needs of passengers in that region. First and foremost, NPTF believes that the current Fishguard Harbour passenger franchise requirement should be replaced with a new service requirement that is designed to meet the needs of all passenger types, and not just those of ferry passengers.

7.3.2. Subsidy levels should allow the operator to provide sufficient investment in the franchise as well as to make service improvements as required over the length of the franchise.

7.3.3. NPTF believes that there should be adequate funding for station improvements, bearing in mind that stations serve as multi-modal interchanges that should facilitate seamless links between bus, rail and community transport networks. The Forum endorses the National Assembly Enterprise and Business Committee's recommendation that inter-modal integration should be a key component in the new Wales and Borders Franchise, which should encompass integrated information, ticketing and timetabling (Integrated Public Transport in Wales. Recommendation 19. May 2013).

7.3.4. In order to increase passenger numbers and bring about modal shift the franchise should not preclude acquisition of improved rolling stock in order to provide a quality alternative to private transport, particularly on long-distance trains. NPTF endorses the focus on overcrowding, provision of information, facilities for disabled passengers, toilet facilities, luggage space, carriage of cycles, and the management of disruption in comments made by the Public Transport Users Committee for Wales (PTUC).

7.3.5. NPTF finds the arguments in favour of longer franchise lengths more convincing than those made by supporters of shorter franchises.

## 8. Conclusions

8.1. In proposing that the 2003 franchise should include additional trains to Fishguard, the Rail Passengers Committee Cymru Wales supported NPTF's view in 2000 that Fishguard train services were not fit for purpose; RPCW noting that the 'two trains in both directions some 12 hours apart running in connection with the ferry sailings are of no real value to travellers to/from north Pembrokeshire'.

8.2. The 48% increase in passenger numbers in the first year of the Fishguard trial services provided evidence that services operating at times that people wish or need to travel would attract more people onto Fishguard train services.

8.3. Further evidence was provided in information about the type of journeys that local passengers were now able to make, in the 200 local responses to the NPTF service evaluation (conducted in the first six months after the opening of Fishguard and Goodwick Station in May 2012). Journey types included: for work/business/education/; for medical appointments/visits; to attend meetings/conferences; to go shopping; for social/leisure/recreational reasons; to go on holiday/day trips/short breaks/and to visit family/friends.

8.4. Passengers travelled to 520 destinations; 115 to Cardiff, 75 to Swansea, 74 to Carmarthen and 70 to London. The majority of journeys were to English and Welsh destinations, 98 and 34 respectively.

Sixty-four percent of the respondents reported that their journeys involved connecting to other trains, and most (77%) had positive experiences.

8.5. Respondents made more positive (274) than negative (172) comments about the train services, the award winning re-opened Fishguard and Goodwick station, and their journeys. More than half (54%) of passengers were over 60 years old, 41% were between 20-60 years, and 5% were under 20 years. More than half (53%) were in employment and 45% were retired.

8.6. In closing, the North Pembrokeshire Transport Forum considers that there is now enough evidence to justify continued provision of the additional Fishguard services and the inclusion of the services in the new Wales and Borders Franchise passenger service requirements for Fishguard Harbour and Fishguard and Goodwick Station.

16<sup>th</sup> September 2013